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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 002188

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: MAOIST SPOKESMAN PUSHES PARTY LINE ON CNN

REF: A. KATHMANDU 2152

- [B](#). KATHMANDU 450
- [C](#). KATHMANDU 2169
- [D](#). KATHMANDU 2124
- [E](#). KATHMANDU 2171

[1](#)1. Summary: Krishna Bahadur Mahara, one of the top leaders of Nepal's Maoist insurgency, granted an interview to CNN on November 14. Mahara, speaking in an open setting with no apparent fear of capture, unabashedly used the opportunity to spread misinformation and propaganda on the international stage. The interview, almost certainly to have taken place in India, reinforces Government of Nepal (GON) suspicions that India is unwilling--rather than unable--to cooperate in handing over the principal leaders of the insurgency. End summary.

MAHARA SAYS MAOISTS NOT TERRORISTS;
CLAIMS NO KILLING OF INNOCENTS

[1](#)2. Maoist leader Krishna Bahadur Mahara, who carries a \$65,000 price on his head and is subject to an INTERPOL warrant, was the chief negotiator in last year's failed peace talks between the Maoists and the GON. Mahara met with CNN New Delhi's Satinder Bindra in an undisclosed location on November 14. Mahara is a senior politburo member of the outlawed Maoist party, and considered to be one of the top leaders of the movement.

[1](#)3. Calling GON accusations of terrorism "baseless allegations," Mahara denied the use of child soldiers and the killing of civilians. "We condemn all types of terrorism," he claimed. "We are a political force... we are not terrorists and that is clear." Mahara also stated that the Maoists have no children in their fighting force. "We do not admit anyone below 18 in our army," he said. "We have the support of the children as well as the elderly. But they are not a part of our army." Blaming the government for civilian deaths that have been attributed to the insurgency, Mahara said that allegations of Maoists killing innocents are false. "We have only killed the criminal elements of our society and that too after issuing them several warnings," he added.

[1](#)4. The blatant mendacity of Mahara's statements was apparent from the clip which immediately preceded interview's broadcast, and is further illustrated by recent news reports. His assertions that the Maoists execute criminal elements rather than indiscriminately killing civilians directly followed a clip of Thursday's incident in which 2 civilians were killed and 25 injured when their passenger bus was blasted by a Maoist landmine. The day before the interview, a mentally disabled 12-year-old and a 14-year-old on his way to school were killed by two separate Maoist bombs (ref A). Not a day goes by without further reports of Maoist brutality--of farmers hacked to death, postal workers beheaded and vegetable sellers blown up by Maoist bombs. Mahara's claim that the Maoists do not employ child soldiers bears equally little resemblance to reality. In March, Ambassador Malinowski met with child recruits in the southwestern city of Nepalgunj who were forced to join the "people's army," to take weapons training and to fight due to fear rather than ideology (ref B). Other Embassy officers also have personally interviewed Maoist child recruits.

[1](#)5. Mahara's interview was broadcast against the backdrop of coordinated Maoist attacks in Jumla and Gorkha districts, in which 60 police and soldiers were killed (ref C). "We want peace," Mahara stated in his interview. "It is the ruling class that is committing injustice on the people; all we are doing is resisting." Yet reports from Jumla indicate that villagers were used as human shields by the Maoists, and may have been killed in the crossfire; that Maoists shot and killed a prison guard after breaking into the district jail and freeing the inmates; and that they looted 3.8 million rupees (50,000 USD) in cash and valuables from the local bank. The interview came five days after a Maoist hit squad killed Embassy contract security supervisor Deepak Pokhrel (ref D); and two days before the Maoists claimed credit for this killing and also for a previous killing of an Embassy direct hire guard (ref E).

16. Full text of Mahara's interview with CNN is available online at asia.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asaipcf/south/11/14/n_epal.leader.iv.

INDIA SUSPECTED AS LOCATION OF INTERVIEW

17. Though CNN coverage gave no indication of Mahara's whereabouts, the interview was filmed in a calm garden setting, in fairly opulent surroundings: Mahara was seated on the floor in a well-appointed room with expensive furnishings and electronic equipment. Most Nepalis believe that the Maoist leader is hiding in India, and local watchers, closely examining the scene for evidence of the leader's location, have cited evidence as tenuous as a view of a particular type of tree that "only grows in southern India," as proof that Mahara is located south of the border. There is speculation that the interview was conducted in Bangalore.

COMMENT

18. Senior Nepali officials have been charging for years that their efforts at bringing the Maoists under control have been compromised by the fact that the principal leaders of the insurgency can find safety and support in India. While the GON admits that India has been helpful in handing over a few Maoists who have fled across the border, the returnees have all been low-level members of the insurgency and not the "big fish." There is a persistent belief that the GOI will not go after the chief offenders because of a desire to maintain leverage over the Nepalis. This brazen public appearance by a leader as highly placed as Mahara would seem to support this view.

MALINOWSKI